



In the Matter Of

Restoring Internet Freedom

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) WC Docket No. 17-108

Written Ex Parte of the Benton Foundation

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On May 17, 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (“Commission”) adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) entitled Restoring Internet Freedom. The Commission should consider the impact of net neutrality protections on small- to mid-sized businesses (SMBs).

Reuben Yonatan is the founder and CEO of GetVoIP. As an entrepreneur and tech enthusiast, Reuben helps SMBs owners build, maintain, and scale their communication infrastructure. In ***What dismantling net neutrality means for small and mid-sized businesses*** (<http://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/how-to/technology/2017/06/what-dismantling-net-neutrality-means-for-small.html>) Yonatan writes, “Net neutrality is crucial for the survival of SMBs: without it, the recent bloom of entrepreneurship and startup culture would shrivel up and die. They rely on open internet to, among other things, launch their businesses, advertise, build a community and build a customer base. The purpose of net neutrality is to protect SMBs from unfair practices from ISPs; without it, there would be nothing stopping ISPs from abusing their positions for profit. In a world without net neutrality, crucial Internet-based services will skyrocket in price.”

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The Benton Foundation urges the Commission to retain the current Open Internet rules and protect the Internet as a platform for American entrepreneurship.

Sincerely,

_____/s/____

Kevin Taglang

Benton Foundation

June 8, 2017

What dismantling net neutrality means for small and mid-sized businesses

Jun 6, 2017, 3:10am EDT

We take the free and open internet as it is now for granted. We expect to use our computers and access the internet without interference.

We all rely on net neutrality rules to uphold fair usage and ensure that everyone, including vulnerable communities, aren't taken advantage of by internet service providers (ISPs). Recently, however, the FCC voted to dismantle net neutrality precedents established in 2015 – the same precedents that secured access to the open and fair internet we've come to know.

Few think about the implications of net neutrality outside of affecting the speed at which one can browse the internet; however, it also influences what you can watch and the online content you can view. Net neutrality is what allows us the freedom to peruse the internet and disseminate content without interference.

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Besides affecting personal use, the fate of net neutrality also has a bearing on businesses -- particularly small- to mid-sized businesses (SMBs).

Why is net neutrality important for SMBs?

Net neutrality ensures ISPs treat all data equally – that is, they can't make "express" lanes available for company giants that can afford to pay the hefty tolls that smaller competitors most likely can't.

However, this principle would change without net neutrality: telecom companies would be able to create these "express" lanes, but only provide better and faster services for companies that can pony up. The companies that can't afford the fees will suffer from lower-grade services, as will their customers.

However, these companies won't just feel the exact tolls – they'll also be reflected in your monthly bill. For example, without net neutrality, companies like Netflix would probably be charged an exorbitant amount due to the amount of data needed to stream video at their current speed. These upcharges would then be passed down to the customer. Without net neutrality, you can even expect currently free platforms like YouTube to enact charges or impose more ads.

Net neutrality is crucial for the survival of SMBs: without it, the recent bloom of entrepreneurship and startup culture would shrivel up and die. They rely on open internet to, among other things, launch their businesses, advertise, build a community and build a customer base.



Getty Images (Kagenmi)

What happens when ISPs begin to auction off internet "fast lanes?" SMBs will never stand a chance.

The purpose of net neutrality is to protect SMBs from unfair practices from ISPs; without it, there would be nothing stopping ISPs from abusing their positions for profit. In a world without net neutrality, crucial Internet-based services will skyrocket in price. Just consider the transgressions ISPs have committed *despite* net neutrality:

- Deliberately throttled internet traffic
- Lied about throttling internet traffic
- Squeezed customers with arbitrary data caps
- Misled consumers about the meaning of “unlimited” internet
- Gave privileged treatment to vertically integrated companies they own
- Strong-armed cities to prevent them from giving their residents high-speed internet
- Fought against being held accountable as public utilities, while profiting from public utility regulations
- Fought and killed privacy rules that protected customer web browsing data
- Held customers hostage to make Netflix pay up
- Lied about net neutrality rules hurting network investments
- Avoided real competition at all costs

Imagine a reality *without* net neutrality. Imagine a reality where this would be the norm.

Now consider what the destruction of net neutrality would bode for startups. A young company that relies on the internet in any sort of capacity would find it extremely costly to compete with massive corporations that are already well-established.

How do you think Hulu and Netflix were able to usurp their predecessors? And Facebook? Net neutrality helps foster innovation and competition by leveling the playing field.

Another important factor that was outlined by Heather Murren of The Nevada Independent is page load time. Currently, your search results are compiled using an algorithm that takes into account multiple factors, with page load time being one of the most influential ones. Sites that load slower rank lower in the search results, which often translate to fewer hits and sales. There are things that can be done to improve page load time and SEO; however, without net neutrality, these optimizations wouldn't matter.

Social implications of net neutrality

There is yet another grave consequence that would come with dismantling net neutrality. Picture this: an organization focusing on social justice catches the negative attention of an ISP. Without net neutrality, there is nothing protecting this organization from having their website essentially blacklisted by this particular ISP – or by any other opposing ISP, for that matter.

Besides affecting businesses owned by people of color and other minorities, net neutrality would literally silence the voices of the already marginalized and underrepresented communities. As expounded upon by Free Press:

“The mainstream media have long misrepresented, ignored and harmed people of color. And thanks to systemic racism, economic inequality and runaway media consolidation, people of color own just a handful of broadcast stations. The lack of diverse ownership is a primary reason why the media have gotten away with criminalizing and otherwise stereotyping communities of color.”

Let your voice be heard

The loss of net neutrality would rob marginalized individuals a platform where they are empowered to freely share their thoughts and organize. It would stifle meaningful, powerful organizations and constrain the marginalized once more to the traditional outlets that have failed them time and again.

It also places significant barriers of entry onto startups and SMBs. Larger corporations can afford to pay for “fast lane service,” but can a startup struggling to survive afford to pay for premium page load time? What happens when ISPs begin to auction off internet “fast lanes?” SMBs will never stand a chance.



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Contributing Writer

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